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ABSTRACT

This paper documents a presentation given on the use of English-language television cooking shows in English-as-a-Second-Language (ESL) and English-as-a-Foreign-Language (EFL) classrooms in Taiwan. Such shows can be ideal for classroom use, since they have a predictable structure consisting of short segments, are of interest to most students, teach specialized vocabulary, use step-by-step directions, and illustrate the eating habits of the target culture. Using the television show "The Frugal Gourmet," the presentation provides a number of activities, keyed to segments of the show, that can be used with ESL and EFL students. Teachers can focus on developing general listening comprehension, specialized vocabulary, and speaking skills. An appendix contains a list of activities for students. (MDM)

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SERVING UP ACTIVITIES FOR TV COOKING SHOWS

A workshop demonstration presented at
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Abstract

TV programs can be a good resource for authentic language materials for advanced students. Having a predictable structure consisting of short segments, the cooking show genre is ideal for intensive listening practice in the classroom. Because we all eat, food preparation is inherently interesting. Students can learn by observation the specialized vocabulary not found in ELT textbooks. Their step-by-step directions illustrate the grammar forms used in describing a process, and their presentation techniques suggest ways students can give more effective oral presentations. Furthermore, the cooking procedures as well as the background explanations may be used in teaching cultural aspects of eating habits. With the audience participating as students, this demonstration illustrated some English language activities that could be developed for use with TV cooking shows. Then, as teachers, we discussed the merits as well as the potential problems with using this genre and speculated on other ways such programs could be made use of in ELT classrooms.

Introduction

Most of us working people have little opportunity to watch the kinds of TV programs presented on weekday afternoons. When we do occasionally see these shows during vacations, we find that they are quite different from the usual evening fare. While late afternoon programming is aimed at children, shows presented earlier in the afternoon target housewives and include soap operas, talk shows, and how-to shows from applying make-up to flower arranging to cooking. It is this last type--the cooking show--that we will look at today as we explore its instructional potential in the English language classroom.

Although cooking shows are generally thought to be women's shows, they need not be limited to this gender. In modern societies, more and more men are discovering the advantages of being able to take care of themselves, whether to share the household tasks with a working wife or to enjoy

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a comfortable bachelorhood. Furthermore, consider the presenters. While some are women--Julia Child (The French Chef), Madhur Jaffrey (Indian Cookery), Claudia Roden (Mediterranean Cookery, Middle Eastern Cookery); many are men--Jeff Smith (The Frugal Gourmet), Ken Hom (Chinese Cookery), Keith Floyd (e.g.,Floyd on France, Far Flung Floyd, and other cooking shows highlighting various cuisines). Most of us have heard it said that the best chefs, or at least the most famous chefs, are men.

All of us--men, women, children, animals--need to eat. Because it is a daily essential, food is a topic of potential interest to everyone. Students may say "I don't want to learn to cook, so why should I watch a cooking program?" There are many things we learn about in daily life and in school which we have no intention of replicating. We learn how flowers are pollinated or how cells divide without pursuing a major in horticulture or biology. Similarly, we can learn how a dish is prepared without intending to cook the dish ourselves.

Indeed, cooking shows are not produced to be a substitute for cooking school. They are primarily entertainment that is at the same time educational (though commercial networks may show them in non-prime time, the bulk of them are produced and shown on educational TV stations such as Britain's BBC, the United States' PBS, and Japan's NHK). Those of us who watch TV cooking shows for pleasure do so mostly out of curiosity. We may have eaten the dish at a restaurant and wondered how it was prepared. We may learn something about the history or the culture of the place the food comes from. Occasionally we may learn a new technique or a new combination of ingredients we might try. A more serious effort comes with the purchase of the accompanying cookbook usually available with any cooking show. The book itself may lie upon the shelf along with other good intentions until activated by the ennui of a rainy afternoon or the sudden urge to write a paper about using cooking shows in English language teaching!

Since most healthy students love to eat--and eat--a short discussion or pre-teaching activity on food or their favorite foods should be enough to arouse their interest in watching and doing some language activities with TV cooking shows. Now we will look at some of the structural characteristics of this genre that may be conducive to language teaching. After that, together we will pretend we are students and do some activities with TV cooking shows. Finally, we will return to our teacher selves and talk about what we did.

Some Structural Characteristics of TV Cooking Shows

Cooking shows produced in the United States and Britain have a very predictable structure. They are meant to fill a one-half hour time slot, so their actual running time is about 25 to 28 minutes. Each episode is usually part of a

series on a particular type of cuisine (e.g., Spain on a Plate, 1992; Floyd on France, 1987), yet each episode itself has a theme, either regional (e.g. "The Basque Country" (Spain on a Plate, 1992); "Turkey" (Mediterranean Cookery, 1987) or on a particular ethnic food or ingredient (e.g., "Snacks" from Ken Hom's Chinese Cookery, 1984; "Soul Food", "Pennsylvania Dutch", "Sweet Potatoes", "Chili"--these four previous episodes from The Frugal Gourmet 1987)). Others, such as the BBC's long-running Food and Drink, have certain regular features each week, for example, their segment on wines or their segment comparing prices and quality of various foods or food-related items.

Each episode of a cooking show usually has a clear introduction. Like a good teacher, the presenter begins by telling us what we are going to do today, what the lesson is for today. The introduction often includes a geography or history lesson on the region or ingredient or procedure. Then three or four, sometimes five dishes are made, perhaps with the preparation of one more complex dish shown in detail. A kind of time condensing is used: we are shown the preparation of the dish, then cooking time is eliminated by showing us the same dish already cooked. Transitions between the different dishes which are prepared are either done verbally (e.g., the next dish...) or set apart by various scenes outside the presenter's kitchen (e.g., where the ingredient grows, purchasing it in the market, how to choose a good one, local people preparing a dish or preparing for a feast or festival).

With series produced by the BBC, as with most other programs produced by the BBC and to their credit, when an expert or the man-in-the-street is speaking in his native language, we have the opportunity to listen to that language if we so desire and/or we can read the English subtitles. During these cultural vignettes, students may be able to practice a little of the French they are also studying.

There is always a conclusion, either in the form of a summary of what was prepared that day (as we see in episodes of The Frugal Gourmet) or in a cultural scene (e.g., the family sitting down to a meal, a festival) where the dishes are or will be consumed. At the very end, a list of ingredients may also appear on the screen.

This structure is used over and over again, making the genre easy to follow for both teachers and students. Now let's look at how these characteristics we've just mentioned can be made use of in the classroom.

Some Sample Activities

First, we are going to do some activities with a series that appears in the United States on public television--The Frugal Gourmet with Jeff Smith. We in Taiwan receive and enjoy cooking shows offered by the BBC World Service such as Food and Drink and the antics of Keith Floyd, but I am limiting myself to using examples from one series only today

because of time constraints and also because I am part of a team working on a comparative culture project and developing teaching materials for Taiwan's Ministry of Education; the particular area I am working on is American cuisine. So today we go American, and perhaps our British participants will also see something new.

Now let me ask you a question. What did you have for breakfast this morning?

[SOLICIT A FEW ANSWERS FROM THE AUDIENCE]

So I see that most of you ate some form of bread. Do you have any idea how old bread is? I don't mean the bread you had this morning, though maybe yours was a bit stale. Bread in some form or another has been around in this world for quite a long time. Let's try to find out some more about it. On your handout (see Appendix, p. 10), you see some questions about BREAD. Let's read them together.

[PUT QUESTIONS UP ON OHP]

1. What does bread usually symbolize?
2. In what part of the world do we find the first evidence of bread? When was that?
3. What was the Greek contribution to the development of bread?
4. How did bread get to Rome?
5. When did the Chinese start baking bread?

Perhaps you know or can guess the answers to some of these questions, so you can check if you were right. We are now going to watch a short video clip about the origins of bread. This comes from the beginning of an episode on breads. Like any good teacher, The Frugal Gourmet always does some pre-teaching: he gives us a little history lesson or tells us some other unusual things to get us interested in the day's topic. While you watch, see if you can find the answers to these five questions.

[SHOW VIDEO CLIP 1 ON BREAD]
(The Frugal Gourmet, Show 512, 1989; Smith, 1991, pp. 544-45)

Did you get all the answers? What are they? [SOLICIT ANSWERS] You're all bright teachers, so we won't watch it again for checking in order to save time. In our classes, we would, when soliciting the answers, try to gauge the difficulty level for our students. We would most certainly watch the clip again, pausing at each of the answers and listening carefully for each word if necessary.

When you first start using authentic video with your students, or even when beginnning with a new genre or another regional variety of English, you may want also to provide students with the full text at this point and let them read along as you play it yet again. While you certainly do not want to do this too often, seeing the text

does give students, particularly East Asian students, a sense of security. I found one special advantage in using The Frugal Gourmet; much of Mr. Smith's commentary on the various foods found in his books follows quite closely what he says on the TV shows; thus the teacher has very little work when she desires to make a transcription of a short segment of the video. Instead of a transcription of the video, we could have students first read the text, which contains much of the same information on the video, and then could listen. At other times, the text could be used as a supplement after listening.

Now, let's try something else. Here is a very simple recipe for rice with cheese and onions. It has nine ingredients. Although nine does not sound too simple, most of the ingredients are rather ordinary things and three of them I'm sure you can already guess. Now, listen to the video clip and write down all the ingredients he uses.

[SHOW VIDEO CLIP 2 ON RICE RECIPE]
(The Frugal Gourmet, Show 406, 1987; Smith, 1990, pp. 448-49)

Did you all get nine? See if the person sitting next to you wrote down the same things you did. What are they? Let's write them on the board. [SOLICIT ANSWERS]

In our classes, we would watch again to check our answers and perhaps pursue some other information, such as listening to Mr. Smith's explanation of why he browns the rice in oil first. Depending upon the degree of cultural difference, students may have questions about procedures or measurements in addition to asking about the ingredients. In East Asia, where rice is the staple of life instead of wheat/bread, we might want to use more of this episode and bring out cultural differences in the types, preparation, and uses of rice.

As a variation on what we just did, we could instead have students write down the procedures used. Let's try it. The Frugal Gourmet is going to show us how to make a food probably most of you have never heard of before, unless you are from the Philadelphia area. It's scrapple. [WRITE NAME ON BOARD] Can you guess anything about it from the name? First, the presenter is going to tell you a little about the background of scrapple, then he's going to show you how to make it. Let's listen to find out something about the origin of the name scrapple.

[LISTEN TO BEGINNING, PAUSE, ASK STUDENTS ABOUT NAME]

Now your task is to write down the steps you need to follow in order to make scrapple.

[SHOW VIDEO CLIP 3 ON SCRAPPLE]
(The Frugal Gourmet, Show 425, 1987; Smith, 1990, pp. 100-01)

What are the steps? [SOLICIT ANSWERS]

As you can see, this variation is a little more complex. Students have to use both the nouns (ingredients and utensils) and the verbs (procedures) and have to come up with complete sentences or imperatives. At this point in class we would watch and listen again, pausing and discussing vocabulary and other interesting points.

Another activity for intensive, word-by-word listening is to make up a cloze. Basically, you make a complete transcription, a lot of work for the teacher, then take out some words. The higher the level of your class, the more words you omit. This is such a common activity, we won't do one here. Many other kinds of activities are suggested in Cooper, Lavery, and Rinvolucri (1991); Stempleski and Arcario (1993); and Tomalin and Stempleski (1990).

Positive Features and Teaching Potential of TV Cooking Shows

One of the best features of TV cooking shows is their length in conjunction with their structure. The parts are easily segmented. For example, in approximately five minutes or even less one dish is prepared from start to finish. This part is usually complete in itself, so the teacher can exploit it for intensive listening and students can watch it more than once and do one or more activities with it. Video in ELT specialists such as Tomalin & Stempleski (1990) say it is better to give students specific tasks with short segments (ideally one to three minutes) than to give them long segments without tasks. That is, when students are asked to look for perhaps only one thing, in the process of listening for that one item, they pay more attention to everything. Without a task, there is no reason to pay close attention.

In our first exercise, we took a four-minute segment and asked five general listening comprehension questions. We do not even have to ask that many, or we could have each row of students look for the answer to a different question. The result would be similar: most if not all students would listen for all the answers while listening for their own. A variation would be to use True/False questions or multiple choice questions.

In our next two activities, we looked for ingredients and procedures. Cooking uses specialized vocabulary that students will not find in their ELT texts but that most men (or at least women) on the street in that culture will be familiar with. You will have to decide on your approach to new vocabulary, and this may differ lesson by lesson. You may want to introduce some essential terms along with some pre-teaching activity, a reading or discussion. In the clip on SCRAPPLE, the words stock, broth, and herbs are fairly important for any kind of cooking, though students could probably guess their general meaning from watching. Other words, such as head cheese, are not important for getting the general meaning and are not necessary for performing the

task. If you later use a complete text or review the tape and pause at these sections, you can ask the students the meanings of these words. Those who know can share their knowledge with those who do not. If students have a written text, they can use their dictionaries on their own time to look up noncritical items.

Please do not prepare all the vocabulary for the students in advance, particularly for ingredients, utensils, and procedures. They will often be able to see these things for themselves from the visual cues. This is one of the main advantages of using video over the short text of a cookbook: we can learn with our eyes. You can put new words such as loaf pan on the board to show spelling and add other information if necessary and freeze-frame to point out the item on the screen.

A follow-up to writing down ingredients and procedures would be to have students write the recipe. We can give students the texts for some simple recipes as samples of the style used and then, after listening to a recipe given on video and taking notes, they can take what the presenter has said and write it in cookbook style. They can practice writing other directions in this style, in the imperative. This is just another way of writing a summary and giving directions in an abbreviated form. It is not a useless activity. Many of our students in Taiwan go to work for companies which export their goods to English-speaking countries. These former English majors often end up writing product manuals or directions for use of a product. The frequent incomprehensibility of these directions indicates that their writers have no experience in writing in the required style of direction manuals.

For a more lengthy speaking activity, students could give a process demonstration speech and show us how to do something. While I have never assigned this activity in conjunction with using a cooking show, I also teach a public speaking course. When I teach the process unit, I remind students of the techniques used in cookng shows, as most students are at least vaguely familiar with this genre or other similar programs for flower arranging or hairdressing.

Other than the language, TV cooking shows illustrate two important points to bring to students' attention. The first has to do with the use of visuals; the audience should be able to see what the presenter is doing. Students can get ideas about the arrangement of a desk or table and the placement of their materials. Other students may act as assistants. Second, students may want to use the same kind of time condensing technique. That is, sometimes a process takes a rather long time, so students can show us parts of each step, then show what the product looks like at the end of each step, just as cooks prepare up to a certain point and then have the finished dish ready to show us.

Though some students have given presentations on how to prepare food, others have shown us how to make various objects (kites, dolls, greeting cards) and how to perform certain processes (how to give a massage, perform CPR, how

to stay awake during a boring class). In all of these, students must organize their steps and their visuals efficiently. While these are not strictly language skills, they are communication skills. For those future teachers, and for most professions, the ability to express one's ideas clearly to others in spoken form is essential. EFL students can help compensate for any language difficulty by using effective presentation techniques.

We videotape our speeches, so students themselves can feel that they are conducting part of a TV do-it-yourself show. They see themselves and can feel proud of their performance. For East Asian students who are used to being receivers of information, the chance to teach others something they know well or are good at is exciting. Furthermore, they know that their teacher will take some of their best performances and use them in teaching the next year's class.

This next excerpt is not from a TV cooking show but from our public speaking class at National Tsing Hua University in Autumn 1992. The Chinese Mid-Autumn Festival would not be complete without mooncakes; most Chinese buy them in stores. Here a student who has made many mooncakes in the past will show us how they are made. For the sake of time, we'll only watch the introduction.

[SHOW VIDEO CLIP 4 ON MAKING MOONCAKES]

I think you can now see that the cooking show format and techniques really illustrate good, basic presentation skills.

A Note on Teaching Culture

I love to watch Madhur Jaffrey (Madhur Jaffrey's Indian Cookery, 1981) or Claudia Roden (Mediterranean Cookery, 1987) prepare food while they tell me stories about the culture and lifestyle into which the dishes fit. I even enjoy reading their cookbooks (Jaffrey, 1985; Roden, 1968). We can do the same for our students with cooking shows that introduce foods of English speaking countries. While in ESL contexts you may take a field trip to a nearby western restaurant and eat together with your students, in some EFL countries we are more limited with regard to choice of cuisine.

Taiwan, where I live, is very modern, yet restaurants which serve good western food are hard to find. (In Taiwan, any food that is not specifically East Asian is considered to be "Western Food.") Fast food places such as McDonalds seem to be everywhere and are popular with young people; however, many other establishments which claim they serve western food offer dishes no American or European would recognize. Eating customs differ, too. Eating out is a part of daily life in Chinese society, whereas the American places greatest value on good home cooking.

Many Chinese also feel both subjectively and objectively that Chinese food is the best in the world and refuse to try anything else. When Chinese travel, they typically do so in tour groups, and these groups try whenever possible to arrange all meals in Chinese restaurants. A western colleague experienced this firsthand recently when he joined a group of his Chinese colleagues on a tour of the Philippines: during their five-day excursion he had no opportunity at all to sample Philippine food!

Thus I am no longer surprised to hear students and even some of their teachers say "Chinese food is so complex, but American food is simple--hamburgers!" Such statements are usually made by people whose expertise in the kitchen extends as far as preparing instant noodles. There is no time to go into more specific aspects of teaching culture today, but I think you can see the direction I am going in for my next project. I hope that cooking shows such as The Frugal Gourmet will help me break some of the stereotypes Chinese students have of western cuisines.

Concluding Remarks

If you can't boil an egg properly, you probably won't want to use a cooking show in your class. It is not a genre everyone would feel comfortable with. Nevertheless, it does have certain good points. As we have seen, the structure is easy to follow and short segments can be exploited in detail. Students can practice listening comprehension and do related reading and writing tasks; they may even give a process demonstration speech themselves using some of the techniques. We can focus on grammatical forms or vocabulary. We can learn something of the history and the culture.

Food procurement, preparation, and consumption are daily human activities and are a part of everyone's daily conversation. Therefore, these activities can enter our classroom, too. Sometimes students and teachers share a meal together. We would surely learn even more from each other if we also prepared the meal together. And we might all be a little more thankful for the food on our tables today if we stopped to think of all the steps involved in bringing that food to us.

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APPENDIX

SERVING UP ACTIVITIES FOR TV COOKING SHOWS

ACTIVITY 1

Read through the following questions. Then you will watch a video clip. While you watch, see if you can find the answers to these questions.

1. What does bread usually symbolize?

2. In what part of the world do we find the first evidence of bread? When was that?

3. What was the Greek contribution to the development of bread?

4. How did bread get to Rome?

5. When did the Chinese start baking bread?

ACTIVITY 2

Listen to this recipe for Rice with Cheese and Onions and write down all the ingredients the cook uses. There are nine.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____
7. _____
8. _____
9. _____

ACTIVITY 3

Listen to and watch the cook: write down all the steps you need to follow in order to make scrapple.

GOOD POINTS OF COOKING SHOWS

---clear structure which is repeated each week

---usually each series has a theme, each episode a topic (e.g., Mediterranean Cookery, "The Basque Country") or regular features (e.g., the drink segment of Food and Drink)

---made up of shorter, clearly defined segments which can be used separately

TECHNIQUES/TEACHING POINTS

---listening to answer general comprehension questions (short answer, true/false, multiple choice, etc.), especially good when background information is given

---listening for ingredients, procedures, specific words (e.g., listening for given words, filling in a cloze)

---using visual cues to learn new vocabulary for utensils, ingredients, procedures; focus on essential items, ignore non-essential ones

---pointing out grammar of process demonstration (e.g., first, next, before, while, having done that...)

---supplementing with reading and writing activities
- -reading directions from cookbooks, manuals
- -writing directions in the style of manuals
- -listening to the TV recipe, taking notes, and writing it in cookbook style

---teaching culture (eating habits, etc.)

---pointing out the effective use of visuals

---pointing out the method of condensing the time needed to illustrate a process by preparing some steps in advance

---assigning students to give a process demonstration speech and videotaping these speeches